IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-39. (Cancelled).

Claim 40. (Previously presented) A method for determining hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, comprising incubating a human sample suspected to be a seroconversion sample containing hepatitis C virus specific antibodies taken from a subject under reducing conditions which prevent formation of covalent, cross linked molecular aggregates with at least one polypeptide consisting of an amino acid sequence found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, which is immunologically reactive with said hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, and determining binding of said antibodies to said polypeptide to recognize seroconversion in said subject, wherein said polypeptide has been modified at at least one cysteine residue.

Claim 41. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein said cysteine residue has been modified by covalent attachment of a modifying group.

Claim 42. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein said cysteine residue has been replaced by another amino acid.

Claim 43. (Previously presented) A method for determining hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, comprising incubating a human sample suspected to be a seroconversion sample containing hepatitis C virus specific antibodies taken from a subject under reducing conditions which prevent formation of covalent, cross linked molecular aggregates with at least one polypeptide consisting of an amino acid sequence found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, which is immunologically reactive with said hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, and determining binding of said antibodies to said polypeptide to recognize

seroconversion in said subject, wherein said polypeptide consists of (a) at least amino acids 21-282 of SEQ ID NO: 9 and (b) a contiguous sequence of less than 20 amino acids that is not found in hepatitis C virus proteins, wherein (b) has been concatenated to the N or C terminus of (a), or an isolated polypeptide which is at least 90% homologous thereto, wherein at least one cysteine of said polypeptide is modified either by replacing it with another artificial or natural amino acid, or by a modifying group.

Claim 44. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 41, wherein said modifying group is maleimidodioctylamine, N-methly-maleinimide, iodoacetic acid, and iodoacetamide.

Claim 45. (Previously presented) The method of claim 42, wherein said cysteine residue has been replaced by serine, or γ- aminobutyric acid.

Claim 46. (Previously presented) The method of claim 43, wherein said polypeptide consists of at least amino acids 19 to 290 of SEQ ID NO: 9, and no more than amino acids 9 to 300 of SEQ ID NO: 9.

Claim 47. (Previously presented) The method of claim 43, wherein said polypeptide consists of at least amino acids 16 to 293 of SEQ ID NO: 9, and no more than amino acids 12 to 297 of SEQ ID NO: 9.

Claim 48. (Previously presented) The method of claim 41, wherein said polypeptide consists of amino acids 14 to 295 of SEQ ID NO: 2.

Claim 49. (Cancelled)